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ABSTRACT

Many studies have examined factors influencing the career aspirations of high school students, but little has been done to explore this issue with primary school students. This study investigated factors that might influence the career aspirations of children across a broad age spectrum. Students (N=150) from grades 2, 5, 8, and 12 completed questionnaires which assessed their job aspirations, their reasons for wanting a particular job, and their expectations for achieving their career goal. Subjects also completed the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory. Parents of the students completed questionnaires on their aspirations and expectations for their child's career goals and provided information on their own occupation, income level, and education level. Regression analyses were employed to correlate variables with one another. Analyses revealed four variables as significant predictors of the subjects' job aspirations: sex of the student, parent's job aspiration for the student, family income level, and mother's occupation. Student self-concept did not significantly predict job aspirations for all subjects. Analyses of each age and sex separately indicated varied and interesting patterns of results. (Author/NB)

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FACTORS INFLUENCING CAREER ASPIRATIONS OF PRIMARY AND SECONDARY GRADE STUDENTS

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One-hundred and fifty students were surveyed concerning their career aspirations and reasons for such aspirations. Parental aspirations for their children were also sought and correlated with the above. Demographic indices for both the students and parents were collected, as well as a measure of student's self-concept, and were correlated with the student's aspirations. Analyses revealed four variables as significant predictors of the subjects' job aspirations. These included: sex of the subject, parent's job aspiration for the subject, family income level, and mother's occupation. Subjects' self-concept, did not significantly predict job aspirations for all subjects. Analyses of each age and sex separately, indicated varied and interesting patterns of results.

(1) Title of Paper:

FACTORS INFLUENCING THE CAREER ASPIRATIONS
OF PRIMARY AND SECONDARY GRADE STUDENTS.

(2) Topical Session Preferences(s):

Social Development
Sex Differences
Social Influence

(3) Major Purpose:

Although a number of studies have investigated factors influencing the career aspirations of high school students (Danziger, 1983; Looker & Pieno, 1983) little has been done to explore this question with children in the primary grades. This study was designed to investigate factors that might influence the career aspirations of children across a broad age spectrum. These included factors related directly to the child, viz., grade level, sex, and self-concept, as well as those related to his parents, viz., occupation, income level, education, and career aspirations and expectations for their children.

(4) Subjects:

One hundred and fifty students were selected from the second, fifth, eighth and twelfth grades of a local public school district to participate in this study.

(5) Procedure:

Each subject was given a questionnaire to complete (second graders received assistance from a graduate student) which assessed the youngsters job aspirations ("What kind of job would you like?"), as well as their expectations for achieving this goal ("Do you think you will probably have this type of job?"). In addition, the reasons, evaluated in terms of intrinsic or extrinsic factors, for wanting the particular job or career

were obtained ("Why do you want this type of job?"). Subjects were also administered the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory to obtain a measure of self-concept, a variable of particular interest in this study.

The parents of these subjects were sent a questionnaire to determine their aspirations and expectations for their child's career goals. The questionnaire also allowed the investigators to collect certain pertinent demographic data from the parents which was alluded to earlier.

(6) Results of Findings:

Regression analyses were employed to correlate the variables of interest with each other to determine where significant relationships existed and yielded the following results.

When including all subjects in the regression analysis four variables were found to be significant predictors of the subjects' job aspirations. The first in terms of its predictive value was sex of the subject. In general males tended to choose occupations that are traditionally viewed as masculine and girls those that are traditionally viewed as feminine. However, when looking at the effect of sex in separate regression analyses for each grade level, sex was found to be the most predictive variable for second and fifth graders, but was not a significant predictor for eighth and twelfth graders. Females aspired to male jobs 20% of the time in second grade, 41% in fifth grade, 59% in eighth grade, and 39% of the time in twelfth grade. Males always aspired to male-type jobs (2nd 78%; 5th, 100%; 8th, 92%; 12th, 69%).

The next most predictive variable for subjects' career

aspiration was the parent's job aspiration for their child. Subjects' whose parents expected or hoped for more prestigious/male-type careers for their child, tended to have children who expressed high job aspiration for themselves. This effect was considerably stronger in the two upper grades.

The third most predictive variable in terms of subjects career aspiration was family income level. Subjects whose parents were in the higher income levels more often aspired to more prestigious occupations. This pattern was stronger for females than male subjects.

The last variable which significantly contributed to the prediction of subject's career aspiration was mother's occupation score. This relation was strongest for fifth graders and suggests that subject whose mothers' were currently engaged in high status/male-type jobs were more likely to choose higher status/male-type jobs for themselves.

Although subjects' self-concept score did not significantly add to the prediction of job aspirations in the analysis with all subjects, it was found to be the second most predictive variable for twelfth graders when their data was analyzed separately. That is, those twelfth graders who had higher self-concepts were more likely to aspire to higher status careers.

In addition to the findings reported from the regression analyses,several other significant patterns were noted in other data analyses using a Chi square comparison. When looking at prestige level of job wanted second and twelfth graders most often picked neutral prestige level careers (each 57%) and fifth and eighth graders most often aspired to high level careers

(51% and 59%, respectively). In addition, although females reported that their career desires were primarily motivated by intrinsic need (e.g., "I like it," "I am smart," "I work hard"), in eighth grade this effect was particularly pronounced when directly comparing male and female subjects, males more often aspired to high prestige-level careers (55%) and females most often to neutral prestige-level jobs (53%). In addition, subjects' parents most often wanted the sons to have male classified jobs (68% of the time) in comparison to 27% of the time for their daughters.

(7) Implications and Conclusions:

The results of this study, suggest that, even in our society where women are entering traditional male occupations in greater numbers than ever, the effect of sex is still a very important factor in influencing the career aspirations of youngsters. Especially interesting is the pattern displayed by this sample where nontraditional career aspirations for females rise consistently in the primary grades and peak with eighth graders, only to be followed by a regression to more traditional aspirations by twelfth grade. This suggests that during the high school years girls may become more traditional in their thinking about career choices than they were in elementary or junior high school. An intriguing follow-up study would be to investigate the reasons for this regression.

The findings also support the major influence the family exerts on job aspirations of children as evidenced by the fact that three of the four significant predictors are family related factors, viz., parents job aspirations for their children; family

income level; and mother's occupational status. This suggests that efforts to broaden the consciousness of our society in terms of career aspirations should be directed as much to the parents of our children as well as the children themselves.

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